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Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization

Security Council
Fifty-eighth year

Identical letters dated 10 October 2003 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

The fifth high-level meeting between the United Nations and regional organizations was convened at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 29 to 30 July 2003. The theme of the meeting was "New challenges to international peace and security, including international terrorism". Twenty-one delegations from regional, subregional and other international organizations took part in that important meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the main challenges to international peace and security facing the world today. The meeting examined potential threats to international security, such as civil wars and complex emergencies, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, international terrorism, gross violations of human rights, genocide, organized crime and other threats such as environmental degradation and the spread of diseases. The meeting also raised important questions as to how cooperative efforts could be strengthened between the United Nations and regional organizations to respond effectively to any new challenges, and it reviewed the follow-up to the previous two meetings, on cooperation in the fields of conflict prevention and peace-building.

I was very pleased with the results of the meeting, which showed renewed commitment by all to increased cooperation between the participating organizations. Among the many important points raised, I wish to note in particular the reaffirmed support of the participants for multilateralism and international institutions in general, the urgent need for the international community to provide effective responses to current challenges to international peace and security and the concern expressed by many that human rights should not be undermined in counter-terrorism efforts.

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I have the honour to transmit to you the conclusions of the meeting, which reflect my understanding of the various proposals and comments as Chairman of the meeting (annex I). I also attach my opening remarks (annex II) and a list of participating organizations (annex III). I shall keep you informed of further progress made by the United Nations and regional organizations in this field of increasing importance.

(*Signed*) Kofi A. **Annan**

Annex I

Fifth high-level meeting between the United Nations and regional organizations

New challenges to international peace and security, including international terrorism

United Nations Headquarters, New York, 29 and 30 July 2003

Conclusions of the Chairman

1. The fifth high-level meeting of the United Nations and regional organizations was held on 29 and 30 July 2003 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The participating organizations discussed the main challenges to international peace and security facing the world today, including international terrorism, poverty, intra- and inter-State conflicts, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime and violations of human rights. Some participants noted that, while these threats were often described as "new", they were in fact of long standing, though they were converging in novel ways and at an increasing speed. The participants felt that, by working together, regional and international organizations could have a major impact upon their broader constituencies.

2. Participants reaffirmed support for multilateralism and international institutions and for the international community to provide effective responses to today's challenges to international peace and security. There was a serious exchange over the implications of the use of force, which participants reaffirmed should be used in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, under the authority of the Security Council. They noted the importance of more frequent high-level meetings between the United Nations and regional organizations. Participants also encouraged the exchange of information among regional and international organizations at the operational, strategic and policy levels.

3. Participants recognized that terrorism represents today a major challenge to international peace and security. They underscored the central role that the United Nations plays in coordinating international efforts against terrorism and in setting the framework for international action. To be effective, efforts against terrorism should be undertaken with a thorough understanding of the environment in which it has emerged. Participants stressed the importance of sharing experiences and best practices, as well as of providing assistance to fulfil international obligations in compliance with Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). This process had been initiated by the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee, which had reached out to regional organizations. Cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations should build on, and not duplicate, ongoing cooperation efforts.

4. The participating organizations reiterated their commitment that human rights should not be undermined in counter-terrorism efforts. They expressed the need to uphold fundamental human rights and existing international obligations concerning human rights as an integral part of the fight against terrorism, rather than make a trade-off between human rights and security, because respect for human rights constituted a basic element in ensuring security. While conventions stating the need

for the respect for human rights were essential instruments, there was a need to ensure compliance with existing standards.

5. At a time when remarkable progress had been achieved in the dialogue among civilizations, participants voiced concern about discrimination against peoples or cultures. While there was an unquestionable need to confront terrorist groups with determination, it was equally imperative to strengthen cultural and religious understanding and to promote the values of tolerance, respect and peaceful coexistence. Multilateral organizations had a key role to play in seeking ways of addressing this issue and in promoting cultural diversity and multilingualism.

6. Participants expressed particular concern about ensuring the protection of civilians, especially children, in situations of armed conflict, in particular by developing cooperative mechanisms for monitoring and peer review of the application and implementation of relevant international instruments.

7. Participants considered that poverty and deprivation continued to constitute equally important threats that could not be considered of lesser priority. Moreover, success in countering these serious problems by means of a successful development agenda could translate into progress in other areas. Peace-building activities should be accorded the highest priority.

8. Multilateral cooperation was key in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. Participants recognized the importance of strengthening multilateral treaty regimes in these areas and of achieving universality both in their membership and in their full implementation. They agreed that regional organizations could make a significant contribution towards achieving and promoting the implementation and strengthening of key instruments in this field. Particular concern was voiced regarding the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The problem of the illicit trade in small arms was also noted.

9. Cooperation in the prevention of armed conflict was also noted as a fundamental element to counter challenges to international peace and security. Current cooperation at the working level should be pursued with renewed vigour.

Further work

10. To address the issues of human rights in the fight against terrorism, as well as the promotion of the dialogue among civilizations, the participants agreed on the need for further consultations at the working level. The participants also agreed on a framework for further cooperation in confronting challenges to international peace and security, including international terrorism.

Annex II

Opening remarks of the Secretary-General to the fifth high-level meeting between the United Nations and regional organizations

New York, 29 July 2003

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to New York for this fifth high-level meeting between the United Nations and so many of the world's leading regional organizations.

At the opening of our last high-level meeting, in February 2001, I said that most of the challenges we face are bigger than any single one of us. If that was true then, it is even truer now.

Our age is abundant with promise. But we have been reminded, in stark and terrible terms, that our increasing interdependence also brings great vulnerability. In rich and poor States alike, many things happen over which people feel they have little control.

Borders are no barrier to the flow of new ideas, goods and services, tourists, economic migrants and communication. But neither do they easily stop the movement of terrorists, warlords, small arms, smuggled people, refugees, narcotics, infectious diseases and environmental hazards.

The vicious sting of terrorism has been felt by the world's most powerful country, by its biggest democracy, by its largest State, by its most populous Muslim nation, and by the home of Islam's holiest sites — indeed, by all of us. And we now see that weapons of mass destruction threaten us not only by their very existence, but also by the potential that they might fall into the hands of terrorists who are difficult to deter and extreme in their methods and objectives.

Civil wars and the disintegration of States create conditions in which civilians are brutalized and warlords, terrorists and traffickers are empowered.

Meanwhile, the question of when and on whose authority military force should be used, be it to protect the innocent or to achieve other aims, arouses great passions — not only in those States where force is deployed, but everywhere.

While many of these problems have long been with us in one form or another, the range and diversity of the challenges presented by the current environment are unprecedented. In discussing how we can work together to address these challenges, I hope we can build on the progress made during our previous high-level meetings in cooperating on conflict prevention and peace-building.

I also hope we can build on the discussions earlier this year, in which regional organizations took active part, in the special meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and in the high-level Security Council meeting on new threats to peace and security.

As we discuss these new challenges, I have invited the International Criminal Police Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization to join us, and I welcome them to this forum. They have much to contribute to the consideration of the items on our agenda.

I do not want to prejudge what course our discussions might take or the conclusions we might reach. But I believe we would do well to bear in mind a few basic points.

First, we must remember that we are all in this together. Let us not add to our burdens by descending into unproductive polarizing over our differences. The interests and values we share are vastly more important than the disputes we have, even on fundamental issues.

Second, as our world changes, our institutions must keep pace with those changes. We need a candid evaluation of our existing mechanisms and ways of working. And we must redouble our efforts aimed at innovation and reform.

Third, we must be proactive not only against common enemies and threats, but also against the factors that allow them to thrive. Much of the work of the United Nations seeks to remove the sense of political grievance and economic despair that can yield recruits to the violent designs of terrorists. This work must have a central place in any overall strategy to defeat terrorism and other causes of insecurity.

Fourth, we must be proactive in promoting the principles in which we believe and which are enshrined in the Charter, including the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Every time we advance the protection of human rights, we deal a blow to the evil designs of terrorists, and we remove a sense of injustice that can cause the oppressed to channel their frustration into illegitimate violence. If we compromise on human rights in seeking to fight terrorism, we hand terrorists a victory they cannot achieve on their own.

If we build on these fundamentals, I believe we can develop a new vision of global security. A vision that respects human rights while confronting the threats of our age — including the threat of terrorism. A vision that draws upon the resources and legitimacy of a network of effective and mutually reinforcing multilateral mechanisms — regional and global — that are flexible and responsive to our rapidly changing and integrating world.

I look forward to a productive meeting and to hearing your views. And I hope that when we conclude we have a common set of specific next steps.

Annex III

List of organizations participating in the fifth high-level meeting between the United Nations and regional organizations

Regional organizations

African Union

Association of South-East Asian Nations

Caribbean Community

Collective Security Treaty Organization

Commonwealth Secretariat

Commonwealth of Independent States

Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries

Council of Europe

Council of the European Union

European Commission

Economic Community of West African States

International Criminal Police Organization

International Organization of la Francophonie

League of Arab States

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Organization of American States

Organization of the Islamic Conference

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

United Nations agencies, funds, offices, programmes and other international organizations

International Atomic Energy Agency

International Monetary Fund

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Office at Geneva

United Nations Office at Vienna/Office on Drugs and Crime

The World Bank Group

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

United Nations organs and departments

President of the General Assembly

President of the Security Council and Chairman of the Counter-Terrorism Committee

President of the Economic and Social Council

Department for Disarmament Affairs

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Department of General Assembly and Conference Management

Department of Peacekeeping Operations

Department of Political Affairs

Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict